From Autonomy to Reciprocity, or Vice Versa?

Jérôme Eneau

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French Personalism's Contribution to a New Perspective on Self-Directed Learning

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Abstract:

After many years of research focused on the individual and psychological aspects of self-directed learning, the field has taken into consideration the context and situation surrounding the education of an adult, placing the development of individual autonomy into a constructivist perspective. But it is only recently, in France at least, that researchers have begun to look more closely at the interpersonal dimensions of learning and that new theoretical approaches have introduced the ideas of reciprocity and exchange, allowing the consideration of the construction of this autonomy in new ways. Referring particularly to French personalist philosophy, following Mounier's and Ricœur's line of thought, Labelle's theory of educational reciprocity reverses the perspective, seeing the process of an adult's autonomization as the result of the reciprocal relationship between him or her and another person.

Keywords: autonomy; reciprocity; French personalism; self-directed learning.

Translation: Kate Davis.

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Jerome Eneau

The importance of a learner's developing autonomy has been at the heart of adult education for many years in North America and in Europe, and more particularly, it has been at the center of research on self-directed learning (Chené, 1983; Candy, 1991; Confessore, 2002; Tremblay, 2003). However, the paradoxes in the concept stem from a fundamental ambiguity as much about the nature of autonomy as about the value assigned to it in the learning process, either as the final outcome of learning or as the preferred method of adult education. There remains much confusion in work on this subject (on both sides of the Atlantic) between an autonomous learner and a learner who could become autonomous; between fundamental, psychological, and methodological autonomy; between autonomous learning and autonomy of the learner; and even, in a more general sense, between self-directed learning and self-directed education. The highly self-referential concept of autonomy necessarily gives rise to some ambiguity when looked at on the epistemological level for, as Chené (1983) pointed out more than 20 years ago, if the idea is for the autonomous individual to construct his or her own laws, as the etymology of the word implies, the learner will constantly be confronted, in a learning situation, with the problem of outside norms, whether they be environmental, institutional, or the construction of another person.

It is on the epistemological level, then, that questioning the manner in which autonomy is constructed, in particular through interactions with others, leads to a specific view of self-directed learning in France that looks at the role of interpersonal relationships in the construction of the learner's autonomy. Without questioning the numerous advances that have been made in North American research in the field of self-directed learning, this European tradition offers a way of looking at autonomy as a development of the self and of personal identity that takes place not only during the learning process but, above all, with and through others. Labelle's (1996) theory of educational reciprocity, which itself stems from French personalism, is part of this trend. This theoretical perspective sheds light on the manner in which the learner's autonomy can be understood as the result of the relationship that the learner has with others, with this relationship being understood as a prerequisite for the education of adults.

As will be shown, this perspective raises new questions for research in the field and also carries different limits for work on self-directed learning (*autoformation* in French) as much as for work on the autonomy of the adult learner in a larger sense. Through its possible practical implications, this perspective sheds new light on concrete situations in which the learner's autonomy can also be constructed through reciprocal exchanges in learning communities or in tutorial situations.

Above all, this theory makes it possible to bring together two research traditions that are still relatively separate. Although it is part of a typically European educational tradition, it also shares certain starting points and theoretical references with North American work on adult education in general, and self-directed learning in particular, as much through its humanist vision as through its constructivist approach to learner autonomy.

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CONSTRUCTIVIST ASPECTS OF THE AUTONOMY OF THE LEARNER

Until now, researchers have placed the emphasis on self-directed learning, ignoring the autonomy of the individual in the larger sense (Confessore, 2002). Indeed, as Tremblay (2003) pointed out in her synthesis survey of the field, the research done on self-directed learning in the past 3 decades, particularly in the United States, has looked at many individual aspects of the learner's autonomy and self-directed learning (its psychological dimensions, characteristics, and skills, etc.) and has provided many ways to measure these aspects. However, this research has not allowed for examination of the more social aspects of autonomy, even though in many contexts they are of primary importance (Brookfield, 2000; Confessore, 2002). Moreover, the self-directed learning movement today seems in part exhausted, at least in terms of the output of empirical research, and it has yet to successfully remove the confusion concerning the nature of this much-sought autonomy or to show concretely how educators can help adults develop their autonomy (Brockett, 2000).

One of the most likely hypotheses, as concerns this partial failure, can be found in the relativist vision of autonomy that results from the concept's self-referentiality. It supposes that human autonomy is both innate and acquired, both a biological given that characterizes every living being and the result of the psychological and social development of every learner. Even if it remains the final objective of any form of education, individual autonomy can only be established in a dialectic between individual liberty and external constraints, in an intermediary state (a process of balance, to use the constructivist terminology) that depends on the situation and the context. In this way, learning, like the individual, can only ever be qualified as relatively autonomous.

On the European side, the *Groupe de Recherche sur l'Autoformation* en France (Group for Research on Self-Directed Learning in France) developed an epistemological approach using Pineau's (1995, 2000b, 2002) work at the Tours School of adult education. Beginning in the 1980s, this trend in research was one of the first in France to deal with self-referentiality, which effectively makes impossible any attempt to reduce autonomy to a set of characteristics or skills transferable from one individual to another. This movement, which locates the source of autonomy in human beings' biological makeup, was itself strongly influenced by the theories of the biologist Varela (1979/1989), and this model was much studied by francophone researchers in adult education and self-directed learning, to the point of being used as a model to explain the process of autodidactism, as in Tremblay's (2000, 2003) work.

This trend in francophone research firmly anchors self-directed learning in a theoretical perspective, which places the emphasis on the autonomy of the learner rather than on the autonomous learning process. It offers a cross-disciplinary approach that takes into consideration the different biological, psychological, and social levels of human autonomy, from work on the self-organization of living beings to constructivist epistemology and the contributions of systemics and complexity. In this way, autonomy is to be understood, following Varela's (1979/1989) thought, as a characteristic of every human being or living system. The characteristic of a living system, in teleological terms, is that it strives to preserve its autonomy through a process of natural and self-organized balance, in interdependence with the outside environment that provides, through different selective actions, the resources necessary for a system to remain in equilibrium. Autonomy is therefore seen as at once preexisting and as an outcome of the system; moreover, it is something to be worked on, preserved, and developed as a characteristic of the individual's identity.

The epistemological and multidisciplinary aspects of Varela's (1979/1989) work, little translated and largely ignored in Anglo-Saxon research on self-directed learning, is nonetheless similar to the conclusions that Candy (1989, 1991) has drawn from his own research, in which he looked at autonomy and self-directed learning from a constructivist point of view. Autonomy cannot be understood in this perspective outside of the context in which it develops; it is precisely the environmental circumstances that allow us to understand how learning progresses and how, in the

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middle of a complex environment, an adult manages to develop his or her autonomy. In proposing a multidisciplinary basis from which to work, Candy (1989) also focused on the autonomy of the adult in the larger sense, rather than simply on autonomous learning. Autonomy is not merely the ability to direct one's own learning; it takes into account emotional, intellectual, and moral dimensions. It reveals itself as much through the adult's conception of himself or herself as an autonomous learner as through his or her aptitude to manage his or her own learning, and as much through an ability to make informed judgments in the framework of the individual's situation as through the ability to use appropriate strategies to learn. For Candy (1991), exterior constraints, as much as the conception of the self, are an integral part of the individual's autonomy. Every person thereby constructs the meaning that he or she gives to his or her learning: "Learners are active makers of meaning" (Candy, 1991, p. 367). Learning is therefore not only a "construe," the result of an interpretation, but a "construct" (Candy, 1991, p. 272), something that individuals build from their experiences. Similarly, the learner constructs autonomy in two ways: He or she creates knowledge from interaction with others and the outside world, and by giving meaning to experience, the learner intentionally, progressively, and dynamically constructs personal autonomy. Following this constructivist perspective, as in Varela's (1979/1989) theory, autonomy should be considered, in Candy's (1989) words, as "a process rather than a product" (p. 111), dependent on environmental circumstances (the context and the situation) as much as on individual capabilities; in other words, as both an innate disposition and an acquired quality.

BEYOND CONSTRUCTIVISM: THE EUROPEAN TRADITION OF ADULT EDUCATION

In its psychological dimension, Candy's (1989) constructivist perspective is similar to the European vision of educational research, which has examined the theoretical foundations of autonomy, mixing biology, learning, and the development of the individual. This tradition can be found today in different movements in European research, both in the relationship of self-directed learning and newly popularized educational techniques or in renewed interest in the contributions of Vygotsky and the Russian School of psychology.

It is important to note, however, that the more social and critical dimensions of the constructivist approach, developed in particular in the United States by Mezirow (1991/2001; Mezirow et al., 1990) in his transformative perspective, have no equivalent in European research. Paradoxically, this view, concerned with the communicational, cultural, or political dimensions of self-directed learning, remains largely unknown to Europeans, even while Mezirow's work and more generally the work of researchers in the critical thinking movement, such as Brookfield (2001, 2002a, 2002b), developed out of the legacy of the Frankfurt School. It is as if Europeans (and the French in particular) have not yet developed the social aspects of constructivism and have even remained ignorant of references to theorists such as Habermas, Fromm, or Marcuse. Other than the difficulty of accessing the material (Mezirow's major work was only translated into French in 2001, e.g., whereas Brookfield's work, like Candy's, remains inaccessible to French readers), it is also possible that the critical dimension of the more philosophical and political aspects of social constructivism is less in line with the European tradition of self-directed learning. This tradition has, in fact, largely forgotten critical philosophy, just as it remains unaware of, for example, the influence of the French theorists (from Foucault to Derrida, and including Deleuze or more recently Bourdieu), who have, on the contrary, remained current in North American academics.

Whatever the reason may be, French theoretical research continues to favor a developmental (and epistemological) vision over a critical (and social) vision of self-directed learning. This research reinforces a different continental tradition in adult education, that of the German *Bildung*, the German term that means a constant education of the individual, in which the emphasis is placed on the construction of the learner's autonomy as part of a more general construction of the self through one's life story or accounts of education, a perspective that includes the individual's existence as a whole.

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In France, the existentialist goal of adult education is at the heart of Pineau's (1995, 2000a, 2002) work, with his tripartite model taken from Rousseau's (1762/1995) work *Emile, or On Education*. For Pineau, an adult creates autonomy throughout the lifespan in a process of self-directed learning that is at once personal, social, and environmental. In Pineau's writing, the autonomy of the learner is the consequence of the entire autoproduction of an adult's own life in multiple, interdependent dimensions that cannot be separated from one another. Autonomy is developed through the three parts of education simultaneously: through the self, through others, and through things. But autonomy is never achieved completely and exists only as something to preserve and to develop; autonomization comes out of a true *Bildung* (Pineau, 2002).

This existentialist perspective of self-directed learning has influenced numerous researchers in Europe, and Pineau's (1995, 2000, 2002) vision of education remains a reference, in the francophone world, for adult education and self-directed learning, which aims at the production of autonomy throughout one's lifetime. Self-directed learning as a process of education of the self thus remains profoundly anchored in the humanist roots of European research on adult education (such as Condorcet, in the French tradition of education that is possible throughout one's life, or even Goethe, with reference to the German *Bildung* and the role of personal experience in self-education).

However, this European vision of self-education and self-directed learning favors a view of autonomy as a process of personal development; if autonomy is an innate human characteristic, autonomization is also the final result of one's existence, something gained through continuous experience that, like identity, must be constantly reexamined. To construct one's autonomy, it is necessary to learn from oneself, from others, and from the resources in one's environment; this autonomy allows a person to maintain and develop personal identity, which is revealed by each of us on the path we follow in life, a path that is never fully completed. In this sense, anyone can surely learn to become autonomous through experience, but it remains the case that this autonomy, which is in some way restricted, is directly dependent on the situation, the context, and in particular the social environment. Insofar as this is true, autonomy is more a form of interdependence between the learner and the environment than a total independence, in which case autonomization would be mixed up with the search for an illusory freedom (freedom to learn, freedom of access to education, freedom of action, etc.).

Personalism, another French philosophical tradition, helps us further understand the relationship between constructing autonomy and constructing identity, as well as the relationship between autonomy and interdependence in learning.

PERSONALISM AND MOUNIER'S CONTRIBUTION TO ADULT EDUCATION

Personalism, born at the beginning of the 20th century in France, is a philosophical movement that rose to prominence in the postwar period, through the work of Mounier, founder of the review *Esprit* and of the much larger movement of communitarian personalism. But it is more likely through Ricœur's thought that the major points of this trend come to us, even though Ricœur himself refused the label of any philosophical school in a strict sense. At best, to distinguish himself from the dominant movements in the middle of the century (mainly existentialism and structuralism), Ricœur (1995) allowed his thought to be called, along with the personalists (like Mounier), humanist in the largest sense, in the style of Sartre or Merleau-Ponty.

Mounier's (1949/1969) personalism is indeed fundamentally humanist, even if it uses a very specific vocabulary that is particularly marked and dated in the French philosophical tradition. It places the focus on the individual as subject, and it affirms above all "the existence of free and creative people" (the person cannot be an object of which we can have outside knowledge) and moreover that any approach to the subject as a person retains a "principle of unpredictability" (nothing that describes him or her can exhaust that definition; Mounier, 1949/1969, p. 6). In personalism, to live is to exist in action and in experience (this likens to Sartre's existentialist vision), but all the while "moving towards

personalization" (Mounier, 1949/1969, p. 8; this recalls Bergson's philosophy). The goal of every life, according to Mounier, should therefore be to become a person, in an affirmation of the self.

However, in this philosophy, the central paradox of a person's existence is that one's existence is something that must be "constantly re-conquered": The history of the person (and that of personalism in a larger sense) is part of a larger effort whose aim is to "humanize humanity" (Mounier, 1949/1969, p. 10). If a person's humanity is indeed rooted in his or her biology, Mounier pointed out, the human condition does not stop at a purely natural determinism; on the contrary, it is part of a movement toward personalization. From this point of view, subjective existence and physical existence are one and the same experience: A person's physical being reveals the person to the self, to the world, and to others. It "constantly thrusts me outside of myself into the issues of the world and man's struggles" (Mounier, 1949/1969, p. 28), in a trend that addresses the core of human existence. Therefore, the relationship of the self to the world is a dialectical relationship of exchange (with others) and ascension (toward the self) that aims to keep this natural condition.

The defining characteristic of personalism, and what distinguishes it from existentialism and from phenomenology, is the fact that it does not see the fundamental experience of a person merely as interior development or reason for existence or relationship to the world, facts, and others. This is another point at which personalism differs from individualism, the latter favoring, as Mounier saw it, isolation and defense. Personalism is not centered on the individual; it sees the individual as first and foremost a being open to others. The person is more than the individual—personalism "removes him/her from the center" by making the person "capable of being other" (Mounier, 1949/1969, p. 38). This fundamental postulate can be summed up thus: "The person exists only in relation to another, he/she can only know him/herself through others, can only find him/herself in others. . . . To be is to love" (p. 39).

Personalism presupposes this striving toward the other, described since Aristotle's time by philosophers in the concepts of love and friendship, *philia* and *agapè*. In recognizing the other as equal but different, which forces one to look outside of oneself, to understand another person, to give and to be faithful, this "positive interpersonal relationship" (love or friendship) constitutes a "reciprocal provocation, making them mutually fertile" (Mounier, 1949/1969, p. 42).

There is then a double paradox for personalism that comes from a drive in two directions: a movement of the self toward the self, a developmental vision that Mounier (1949/1969) named personalization, and a movement of the self toward the other, which he called communication. For Mounier, the final result and the defining characteristic of humanity are found in this point: To construct oneself is to construct oneself through and with others. And if Mounier uses the term *autonomy* infrequently, more often choosing the term *freedom*, it is the notion of autonomy that is concerned in the perspective of personalist education. Mounier stressed that "absolute freedom does not exist… a person makes him/herself free, after choosing to be free [making him/herself] free through others' freedom" (Mounier, 1949/1969, pp. 75-76). But, added Mounier, "It is part of the human condition to constantly aspire to autonomy, to pursue it ceaselessly, and to forever fail to reach it . . . ; the battle for freedom is endless" (p. 81). If our emancipation is a permanent quest, something earned through the humanization that results from the process of personalization, it is also because this vision of human beings demands that we consider "freedoms" as much as "freedom," that is, another person's freedom as much as our own freedom (p. 78).

Therein lies the most ambitious part of personalism's educational aims: Education must not "create" persons, but rather "awaken" them (Mounier, 1949/1969, p. 129), and they must be revealed to themselves through their relationships with other people. The goal of education is to make men and women free and responsible, in a liberty that depends not only on the subjectivity of individuals' independence from one another, but on an accepted and chosen interdependence: "Mediation means our servitude, but it is also a healthy discipline," affirmed Mounier (p. 94). To do this, one must become

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truly engaged on different fronts at once in a voluntary act to educate, to change, to bring people together, and to enrich their values; the end result of personalism is as much social as it is individual.

For Mounier (1949/1969), this educational and cultural commitment is necessary to bring about the profound transformation of the subject that he sought through his theory of personalism. It includes an important political dimension (even if this dimension must be considered in the context of postwar Europe). If we wish to build a culture that will be "what remains when we are sure of nothing else: humanity itself" (Mounier, 1949/1969, p. 130), then education must prepare its students for action and change. We must cling to this objective, Mounier said, even with a "tragic optimism" (p. 32), and this commitment is never simple, never perfect, but we have no alternative. Still greatly affected by the rise of Nazism, he wrote: "We are only ever involved in questionable combats for imperfect causes. To refuse to become involved is to refuse the human condition. . . . He/she who does not become involved in politics passively supports the politics of the established power." (p. 112)

PAUL RICŒUR'S INFLUENCE ON FRENCH RESEARCH ON AUTONOMY

Although unclassifiable in any strict sense, Ricœur (1985, 1995, 1996, 2004) had much in common with personalism, and he contributed greatly to the development of its ideas and values. He particularly influenced the existentialist and developmental movements of self-directed learning in France through two major aspects of his writing: the historical and narrative dimension of the construction of identity and the ethical dimension of this construction.

Ricœur's contributions to adult education are important for several reasons. To begin with, although he was close to Mounier and Christian personalism, Ricœur (1985, 1995, 1996, 2004) himself always kept a certain distance from the lyricism that can be found in a humanism colored with religious belief, as can be seen in the work of other personalist philosophers, such as Buber (1923/2002), Nédoncelle (1942), or Mounier (1949/1969) himself. Ricœur's long career in the United States (especially at the University of Chicago), the influence of Anglo-Saxon philosophy on his thought, and his different investigations of extremely diverse fields made for a multifaceted body of work, as rich as it is complex, with a very personal approach to the person that is not merely personalist.

On another front, the contributions of Ricœur's work have proven to be an important source of inspiration and a reference in education's existentialist dimension. In studying the notions of time, language, and metaphor, Ricœur (1985) took a theoretical approach to the major concepts of this perspective on adult education. The idea of a narrative identity in particular raises quite a few questions as to the manner in which we understand ourselves through the telling of our story and as to the place and the role of language and interpretation, somewhere between truth and fiction, in the narration and the perception of the self (Ricœur, 1995). This notion of narrative identity allows us to understand how, in autobiographical methodologies in particular, the identity of a person is constructed and perceived, first and foremost, through the account that the individual gives of his or her own life. This autobiographical approach is still a very topical movement in French research, particularly in the work of the Tours School, mentioned above.

It is, however, probably Ricœur's (1990/1996) work *Oneself as Another* that represents his most important contribution to the existentialist and developmental perspective of adult education. A major work in Ricœur's career, Oneself as Another lays the groundwork of a "hermeneutic of the self," the result of which is a triadic ethical structure: self-esteem, concern for others, and just institutions (Ricœur, 1990/1996, p. 27). In this work, Ricœur examined the statute of the self (distinguishing it from I or me), as well as the notion of identity, with the double meaning of the book's title in French (*soi-même comme un autre* can be understood in French as "oneself or another person" or "oneself like another person"). Looking closely at the term oneself, Ricœur made a distinction between identity-sameness and identity-selfhood, identity-*idem* (*mêmeté* in French, *idem* in Latin: the continuity of the person's identity; the person remains the same through time and through changes) and identity-*ipse*

(*similitude* in French, *ipse* in Latin: the fact of being identical to, the same as; that is to say, like something or someone). Finally, through the investigation of dialectical relationships between the self and the other and after having examined the tension between oneself and the other, (Ricœur 1990/1996) proposed an ethical aim that reconciles this dialectic: "The autonomy of the self appears to be intimately linked to concern for those close to us, and to justice for everyone" (p. 30).

It is in this articulation of the difference between identity and autonomy, a meeting between individuality and confrontation with the other, that Ricœur's thought is most original. Ricœur (1990/1996, p. 139) affirmed first that "the self seeks its identity throughout one's entire lifetime." This identity, for Ricœur, comes out of a confrontation between the identity as *sameness* and as *selfhood*. Yet the temporal permanence, the continuity that constitutes the person's identity, is the "sameness of the self" marking its autonomy; autonomy is only found then where the self meets oneself, after a long education of "self-esteem" and "respect for oneself," when a person has finally signed a contract to "obey his/her self," but a contract in which the concept of obedience has lost any mark of dependence
or submission: "True obedience, it could be said, is autonomy" (p. 245).

The contract with the self is not made either in independence or in solitude. For this is where the "ethical aim" - in other words, the "aim of a good life" in both what is "judged good" and what is "obligatory and therefore must be" (p. 200) - that Ricœur (1990/1996) proposed becomes apparent. The good life, expressed concretely in self-esteem and respect, cannot be separate from other people: *Philia* (friendship in Aristotelian terms) is a virtue that allows one to progress from the self to oneself through an understanding garnered from "otherness" and "reciprocity" that the other person is simply another like oneself (p. 214). To construct oneself, a person must face the responsibility that another person represents, inherent in his or her presence.

For Ricœur (1990/1996), the ethical aim is not limited to the esteem and respect for oneself and a few close friends in the bounds of friendships involving a small number of partners. Ethics, in the measure that it is required, also takes into account other people in general in "what is right," that is, what is both good and legal (Ricœur, 1990/1996, p. 231). An ethical position, according to Ricœur, cannot be constructed without considering the idea of justice, which extends the principle of concern for another to include equality and which, on the level of life in society, governs interpersonal relationships, like friendships between a few privileged partners. Justice proceeds on the basis of equality ("equality is to life in institutions what concern for another is to relationships between people"), which makes possible, by its ability to regulate power and domination, common rules that allow us to "live together" (p. 236).

Each person's autonomy, said Ricœur (1995), is a process that ends in esteem and respect for the self, but for a self that has already met the other and is only "returning home at the end of a great journey; and it is as another person that he returns" (p. 77). This autonomy is constructed then in the concern and care for justice for every person, and it is to be found in the aim of a "good life, with and for others, in just institutions" (Ricœur, 1990/1996, p. 202). If we follow Ricœur's logic, the autonomy of the person can only be constructed at the same time as theperson is developing an identity (sameness or selfhood) in an ethical outlook that necessarily takes into account the other, that "other me" through which the "I" creates itself.

With *The Course of Recognition* (Ricœur, 2004), the last work published before his death, Ricœur offered a new way to consider autonomy through an altruistic perspective of identity. Concern for another, based fundamentally on the exchange of giving and receiving, is at the heart of the reciprocal relationships that people create to construct themselves, and reciprocity is the sine qua non for the autonomy of every person, an autonomy that paradoxically can only be constructed in otherness (Ricœur, 2004).

To summarize, as Lerbet-Sereni (2000) noted, Ricœur's main contribution to the ethical aims of self-directed learning is thus to reconcile with the quest for individual autonomy by opening the paradox of one's autoreferentiality to others. For Ricœur, autonomy is to be found at the meeting point between

some of the most important concepts, such as identity, responsibility, and reciprocity; it is therefore the end result of an identity that is constructed throughout a lifetime and whose aims are as much a good life for oneself as the best way for all to live together. Autonomy, from Ricœur's perspective, is then fundamentally a dialogue, standing with the rule of justice and the rule of reciprocity. Autonomy cannot be self-sufficient because it must be constructed with and for others, in just institutions (Ricœur, 1998).

A PERSONALIST VISION OF ADULT EDUCATION: LABELLE'S THEORY OF EDUCATIONAL RECIPROCITY

The autonomy of a person, in this perspective, necessarily calls on the other, and any attempt toward the autonomization of an adult cannot take place without a strengthening of the attachment to the other in a new, consciously chosen interdependence. In adult education, that is the theoretical path that Labelle (1996) followed in developing the notion of educational reciprocity, drawing on the work of another French personalist, Nédoncelle (1942), a contemporary of Mounier and Ricœur.

Labelle (1996) placed the educational process at the heart of the relationship established between the self and the other during the act of learning. Reciprocity in this way "marks" the educational process; however, this reciprocity is not only educational but educating in a deeper sense (p. 191). In other words, from this point of view, there can be no learning leading to autonomy without a reciprocal relationship with another person, for it is this relationship that gives birth to the person. As Mounier (1949/1969) used the term, person signifies an autonomous adult who is a responsible citizen, capable of constructing personality with and through others, and following Ricœur's aims, while helping the other to construct personality and, as part of a larger contract, extending this relationship to the community. This approach in fact offers from a French point of view a change of perspective for adult education and self-directed learning, at least in its humanist and existentialist traditions (Labelle, 2000).

First of all, autonomy, for Labelle (1996), is both a preexisting condition and the end result of learning—a preexisting condition because one cannot ignore what the adult already is when beginning an education program, and autonomy can, in this way, be considered a characteristic inherent to the adult learner. Moreover, autonomy is the end result in the perspective of identity and the construction of the self examined above: Autonomy in the largest sense of the word is the objective of adult education. This end result, following the personalist tradition's maxim "know thyself," is "that the other becomes him/herself" (Labelle, 1996, p. 158). It, in essence, comes to the fact that the search for autonomy in some sense wagers on people's humanity and the idea that education can be the tool to develop the process of autonomization. That is the fundamental goal of education: to help us "become who we are," even if we never know "who we are," because this goal "lies before us" (p. 132). Autonomy is then "at the very heart of a person, like an inscription that defines him/her from the beginning and [at the same time] like a promise that is realized over time" (Labelle, 1996, p. 233). Indeed, according to Nédoncelle (1942), for whom we have the capacity, the obligation even, to conquer our autonomy, the autonomization of the adult learner must remain the objective of all learning: "Education is a progression towards autonomy" (Labelle, 1996, p. 296).

The interpersonal relationship is for Labelle (1996) at the basis of the process of autonomization; indeed, "the relationship to another is not an accident, rather it is an essential element of the personal being" (p. 163). The autonomy of the partners in an educational relationship is constructed within and through the relationship, in a dialectic of interdependence or, at least, in an independence that can only be very relative: "attachment to the other in order to become oneself, by distinguishing oneself from the other" (p. 152). Just as autonomy is not synonymous with independence, no more so is attachment to another synonymous with dependence; on the contrary, what takes place in the educational relationship is a conscientious act of exchange and reciprocal construction of the partners, with the aim of making each one more autonomous, with the moral obligation to live together. Indeed, "to be autonomous means being responsible for oneself in an environment populated with other autonomous

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subjects" (Labelle, 1996, p. 4). Autonomization is, therefore, seen as the process that extends throughout the development of the adult learner, a meeting of a need, or a process of "coming into oneself" at the point at which the individual and the collective interests meet (Labelle, 1996, p. 153).

In terms of application, this vision of the autonomization of the adult learner carries certain implications. As it depends both on the learner and on his or her autonomy relative to the situation and the context, this vision requires a permanent adaptation on the part of the educators and of the institutions. Like the constructivist perspective, the personalist vision cannot be summed up in any miracle formula. Nonetheless, Labelle (1990, 1996) favored, with his theory of educational reciprocity, certain teaching tools and recommended in particular a "contract based strategy" (Labelle, 1996, p. 227) similar to Knowles's (1986) method.

Based in large part on group work, this approach to reciprocity, although it respects above all the individuality of the learner, also favors a certain number of collective learning methods. Much like the group's place in adult education in the North American tradition (Solar, 2001), it places emphasis on discussion and listening (in question-and-answer form), an adaptation to the learner's concrete problems (drawing on each person's experiences), and working toward learning that is a shared process (finding motivation, support, and mutual satisfaction). Labelle (1996) recommended work in pairs, which plays on reciprocity, combined with "workshop methods" (dividing learners into small groups or autonomous units), so as to avoid the two extremes of "absorbing differences" in the mass or "dividing" the whole (p. 247). According to Labelle, these groups allow both the individual and the group as a whole to learn: In this way, "progress is individual *and* collective, or *collegial*" (p. 249).

As concerns the educator's position, Labelle (1996) insisted on the need to remove any attitude of subservience (and subjection) as much as the desire to emancipate (and make free; p. 227). Reciprocity, based on the recognition of and play on individual differences, is founded on a contractual relationship between "autonomous, responsible citizens" (Labelle, 1990, p. 91). Respect for others presupposes respect for both partners' autonomy in the educational relationship before any relationship is established. The educator's attitude should then tend toward a democratic style of directing, a middle path or a position "safely between proximity and distance" (Labelle, 1996, p. 227), a delicate balance between autocratic commanding and an anarchic free-for-all. This guidance must take into account the different needs of the actors in the educational relationship (learners, institution, and the educator himself or herself), within the learning project's logic, "excluding all demagogy and laissez-faire" (p. 232).

The educator is also the person directly responsible for the learning dynamic: On one hand, the educator "negotiates with each person the theoretical receivability and the methodological feasibility of the projects"; on the other hand, he or she remains the guarantor for the collective rules that allow the process to take place while "respecting the autonomy of the persons and their collaboration within the group" (Labelle, 1996, p. 230). In this way, the contract founded on reciprocity does not place the "educational relationship in a state of complicity nor in a forceful relationship nor in openness, but rather in the autonomous involvement of members of a self-directed group" (p. 256).

With his theory of educational reciprocity, ultimately Labelle offered an ethical vision of adult education that he likened to a form of andragogical prevention, as he called it, whose aim is to develop people's autonomy out of their interdependence on one another, which constitutes a basic part of their autonomy and their identity. The construction of this autonomy, in its individual and collective dimensions, is in fact very close to the construction of the person's identity, both personal and social; in this sense, the process of autonomization and the construction of the identity are intimately linked, and both depend on interactions with the other. Labelle (1996) summarized it this way: "Otherness and identity are the two faces of personal autonomy" (p. 196).

Finally, by supposing an asymmetrical relationship between the individuals (who do not delude themselves with a supposed equality of the partners in the relationship), educational reciprocity

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depends on the individuality of every person and on their differences so that the dynamic relationship inherent in reciprocity can bring each person to himself or herself in the bidirectional motion that stems from difference and otherness.

Beyond its personalist sources, Labelle's (1996) theory defines autonomy and reciprocity while offering to adult education and self-directed learning a singular perspective on the development of the person through relationships to others. As Blanchard and Jollivet-Blanchard (2004) summarized it, the theory of educational reciprocity makes different major statements: Education is an effect and not the cause of the relationship (i.e., reciprocity is educating more than educational); similarly, autonomy is founded on the paradox that attachment to others is a quest for detachment (i.e., autonomy is more a form of interdependence than an illusion of independence). In this way, if the aim of education is adult autonomy, this autonomy must be constructed through attachment to others, exchange, and reciprocity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To be autonomous, or to educate oneself, with and through others?

This personalist perspective in adult education gives self-directed learning a new basis from which to think about the autonomization of learners, in terms of theoretical implications and in practice. However, it also stresses the limits and brings up the research that remains to be done on this front.

Conceptual importance of personalist perspective

The theoretical implications of this perspective can be summed up in the analysis of the work of Mounier, Ricœur, and Labelle presented above. It stipulates first of all that autonomy is a characteristic of every adult learner, each learner already being a relatively autonomous person with an interest in development. For Mounier, as for Labelle, the autonomization of the adult is seen as a process, never entirely completed, that aims for further autonomy. This is similar to the existentialist tradition of adult education in Europe, for which the final result of education is the development of the self throughout an entire lifetime. Therefore, for self-directed learning, the objective is an overall and permanent self-education whose aim is to construct oneself as a person and not simply as a learner capable of managing his or her own learning projects.

Moreover, according to Mounier (1949/1969), the process of autonomization takes place in the dual action of personalization and communication. As the self only exists in relation to others, autonomy is constructed through an attachment to the other to construct oneself. This is what Ricœur (1990/1996) found in the bonds between autonomy, identity, responsibility, and reciprocity: The identity of the self is constructed in the relationship to the other, and the limits of our independence are dependent on the social contract that we may or may not be able to build together. Last, for Labelle (1996), it is precisely this reciprocal relationship between the self and the other that allows learners to construct their autonomy. Otherness and identity are two indivisible aspects of personal autonomy; adult education can only ever be, on a fundamental level, a reciprocal self-education of the learners.

This is why, in the personalist perspective, the notions of identity and autonomy are so closely linked. Autonomization cannot be considered except through a developmental perspective on identity. A person, as Mounier (1949/1969) used the term, is in fact an autonomous being, someone who is capable of constructing a good life following Ricœur's ethical aim, but also someone who is responsible for himself or herself and others, a citizen capable of participating in the construction of just institutions. Labelle (1996), in applying personalist thought to education, pushed it to its extreme: According to his theory, the reciprocity between people precedes the educational relationship. The autonomy of the person, from this point of view, can only be considered in light of otherness.

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Limits of this perspective and possibilities for further research

There are, however, multiple limits to the personalist perspective. Contrary to Pineau's (1995) existentialist theory, for example, or Candy's (1991) constructivist vision, the personalist perspective places the accent on the relationship that the learner has with others (in particular, educators or work partners) and partially leaves out the influence of the nonsocial environment on the learner (what Pineau called things or the world and Candy called the context or the situation), whereas studies on self-directed learning have shown for some time (through Spear and Mocker's work or that of Danis and Tremblay in the 1980s, both cited in Tremblay, 2003) to what extent the individual and his or her environment form a "reciprocal determinism" in learning (Tremblay, 2003, p. 109).

Without wishing to reduce the environment to merely social dimensions, it would therefore seem important to study, at the very least, the manner in which these interpersonal relationships are themselves influenced by the social environment in the widest sense, and this also from a personalist point of view. Such an examination would exceed the scope of this article, but it should be particularly noted that if the understanding of the social dimensions of self-directed learning is to continue to progress, additional research is needed to understand the extent to which the social environment affects self-directed learning.

From this point of view, European and particularly French research has most likely neglected the importance of the social, cultural, and political dimensions to self-directed learning for too long. Carré's (2005) work, in referring to research in social psychology, and to Bandura (1977) more precisely, certainly offers a bridge between adult development, social interaction, and self-directed learning. Otherwise, the path forged by Mezirow (1991/2001) remains one of the rare areas available to French researchers. However, the tradition of critical sociology they have to work with could be a promising lead for investigation, as work on gender, which is only beginning to emerge in France, has shown (Bourdieu, 2002; Butler, 1990/2005). As in other areas influenced by feminism or poststructuralism, this research could likely offer important developments for this sociological and critical perspective.

As mentioned by Labelle (1996) in his theory of reciprocity, another theoretical limit of the personalist perspective lies in the confusion, among the French in particular, that exists between self-directed learning and self-education. The European humanist vision is more concerned with the latter, tending in general to confuse self-education with adult education; it is perhaps time, therefore, to explore new paths in research to make these distinctions clearer.

The personalist perspective insists on the autonomy of the person by denouncing the reduction of this autonomy to simple questions of control or initiative in learning and by fighting for a broader understanding of autonomy, thereby participating in the construction of the learner's identity. Although it may be less concrete and functional than the North American body of work on self-directed learning, the French perspective reminds us how rich this notion of identity can be from the research point of view. North American work is more centered on pragmatic aspects of instrumentalization or the measure of autonomy in learning and has hardly sought to explore the implication of this notion on others. The French personalist perspective, on the other hand, stresses how much the relation to another (educators, peers, colleagues) can contribute to educating the self.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND IMPACT ON EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Educational reciprocity offers new possibilities, in terms of its applications, which also deserve additional contributions by way of illustration, to the understanding of how self-directed learning may be constructed in and through relationships with others. Thus, work on personalism builds helpful links between self-directed learning and other fields of research and applications.

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Following, for example, the constructivist vision of learning (Candy, 1989) in which the learner adapts or accommodates to the environment, this perspective could be tied to Kegan's constructive developmental theory particularly as it applies to group learning or on-line collaborative learning (Smith, 2005). The personalist perspective could also be compared with constructionist methods developed in Northern Europe, which favor learning through others via a tutorial that makes it possible to direct one's own learning (Martin, 2004). Like constructivism, this perspective favors the view of autonomy (or rather autonomization) as a process (rather than a state or as a product); like constructionism, it favors a method of accompaniment where the principal objective is to help the learner "do without the imposed teacher" (Dumazedier, 2002, p. 128). Through learning that is reciprocal between two people (via a gaining of trust, imitation, appropriation, and then transfer), the coach's or tutor's control progressively disappears and gives way to the learner's full mastery of the professional gesture and mastery of the decisions for his or her own learning (Martin, 2004).

Moreover, on this practical level, according to Labelle's (1996) work, this perspective leads us to develop choices in self-directed learning that work on individual aspects as much as on collective ones, counting on the fact that developing the autonomy of individuals favors the autonomy of a group of learners, and vice versa. From this point of view, the theory of educational reciprocity also creates connections to new fields of research, for example, to cooperative learning, situated learning, learning communities, or communities of practice. Work on group learning could also be compared with the contributions of other work on cooperation or collaboration, particularly to study the effect of tutorial learning, reciprocity, and gift or gift-type exchanges in collaborative on-line learning, for example, or even in virtual communities, which work with the notions of autonomy and identity in individual and collective dimensions.

Some work is beginning to emerge in France as a result of this new light shed on the subject. This work studies, with this new frame of reference, how individuals can construct their professional codevelopment in groups or pairs (through analysis and reflection on practices, e.g., in groups of adult educators who are developing their professional identities, both individual and collective) or how knowledge and skills can be transmitted through reciprocal exchanges between old and new employees (within the process of intergenerational transmission when the workforce is renewed with younger generations). In the field of self-directed learning, which concerns individuals as well as work and training groups, or even in a broader sense in the field of adult education, educational reciprocity opens new paths in empirical research while still fundamentally questioning a person's relationship to others and how they can live together.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, however, this vision consequently leaves little room in terms of ethics in which for educators to work. If autonomy is constructed and is not something that can be given, as Candy (1991) reminded us, then from Labelle's (1996) perspective, it takes place through a reciprocity based on exchange and otherness. The aim of reciprocity is a primordial finality of the education of every adult: a person capable of constructing, with and for others, a better life in a more just world. From this point of view, taking responsibility for or control of one's own education results from taking responsibility for oneself and one's own life, an ethical demand that goes beyond formal learning skills. Above all, it requires work on values rather than on methods or a particular knowledge.

From this point of view, the personalist perspective yields more political implications than it offers practical plans. It supposes that autonomy is born out of a realization of the interdependence of people who are summoned and bound to construct a social contract together in a logic of cooperation and reciprocal exchanges. This concept rejects the vision of personal autonomy that is the result of an atmosphere of individualism or competition, in a race for skills, or a performance dictated by one individual's point of view. Within this framework, the political consequences of an education that aims to develop the autonomy of its learners are found in the end result of the educational process, and the role

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of educators is therefore key. This position demands that they continually question their place and the role that they can (and should) play in the process of constructing the learners' identity.

To help an adult to be autonomous, to recognize and support autonomy (to become a person), is then to help the other find a rightful place in the construction of a communal society, and therefore to question one's own place and one's responsibility as an educator to help build a new model of how we are to live together.

To help another person become autonomous is to make a clear choice for the end results of the educational process, but to choose them in a "collegial" way, as Labelle (1996) termed it. In this perspective, the notions of contract, dialogue, and negotiation must be at the heart of adult education, to accompany the learner in the true building of the self.

To help the learner develop autonomy in contexts that are often restricted by economic concerns is, in effect, to favor the construction of the identity as a citizen over the identity of an effective learner or a successful employee.

The cost of this could be a questioning of the established order and the risk of a potentially destabilizing awakening. Today, we may no longer live in the time of Mounier's (1949/1969) tragic optimism, yet as Ricœur (1995) reminded us, we nonetheless live in the complexity of life in society. And we continue to construct ourselves by ourselves, in a narrow path "where we must more often choose between gray and gray than between black and white, in distressing situations, where we must choose not between good and evil but between bad and worse" (Ricœur, 1995, p. 81) in this endless quest for our own autonomy.

Finally, to help the person develop this autonomy means to be ready to pay the price of individual emancipation so that everyone may find a place and participate, as far as relative autonomy permits, in a renewed democratic society. The contributions of French personalism to self-directed learning, then, are not to be found in the tradition of the likes of Goethe or Condorcet, but in the renewal of its ties to its profoundly humanist roots.

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